

## EARLY DAYS OF THE G. A. R.

The Work of Dr. Stephenson and His Assistants in Founding the Order—Illinois's Claim.

By ROBERT MANN WOODS.

All the questions connected with the origin and establishment of the Grand Army of the Republic were thought to have been authoritatively and satisfactorily settled by the Report of the Committee on Seniority of Departments at the sessions of that committee at Philadelphia, at Detroit and at Milwaukee, after exhaustive research and the production of convincing records. The report of the committee was unanimously adopted by the National Encampment at Milwaukee, which fixed the seniority as follows: First, Illinois; second, Wisconsin; third, Pennsylvania; fourth, Ohio, etc.

But in 1901, in the Report of the Proceedings of the Department of Indiana, there appears a report, signed by Gen. R. S. Foster, Gen. J. R. Carnahan and Comrade William H. Armstrong, which was approved and adopted by the Department of Indiana, in which it is broadly asserted in general terms, and with specifications that the Department of Indiana was the first to give life and vigor to the Grand Army of the Republic, and was not only the first Department organized, having the first actual Department Commander and the first Assistant Adjutant-General, but that it had the first Adjutant-General of the National Organization.

This report, the truth of which not having been officially denied, has emboldened one of the Indiana comrades to publish a book, called "The History of the Grand Army of the Republic Under Its First Constitution and Ritual," in which he reiterates the statements, which were evidently made without knowledge of the actual facts by the men who signed the Indiana report, and adds many more statements which are so unwarranted by the history of the formation of this grand Order that it becomes necessary to make statement of the actual conditions which obtained at the time of its formation, that those not knowing the actual facts may not be misled, and to justify the finding and decision of the National Encampment and the rule of seniority as now established.

## The First Steps.

The Grand Army of the Republic was established at Springfield, Ill., April 1, 1866.

The first order ever issued is as follows:

"Headquarters Department of Illinois, Grand Army of the Republic, Adjutant-General's Office, Springfield, Ill., April 1, 1866.

"General Orders, No. 1.  
The following named officers are hereby announced on duty at these Headquarters:

"Col. Jules C. Webber, A. D. C. and Chief of Staff of the Department of Illinois.  
"Col. John M. Snyder, Quartermaster-General.

"Maj. Robert M. Woods, Adjutant-General (P. Box 4).  
"Capt. John A. Lightfoot, A. A. G.  
"Lieut. John S. Phelps, A. D. C.

"By order of B. F. Stephenson, Commanding Department.

"Official.  
"Robert M. Woods, Adjutant-General."

During the month of April, 1866, eight Posts and five Districts were organized as follows:

"April 8, Post No. 1, at Decatur, Ill., Capt. M. F. Kanan, commanding, District of Macon, Col. Isaac C. Fugh, commanding.

"The charter of Post No. 1 is as follows:  
"Grand Army of the Republic, Department of Illinois.

"To all whom it may concern, greeting:  
"Know ye, that the Commander of the Department of Illinois, in response to the patriotic and confidence in the patriotism and fidelity of M. F. Kanan, G. R. Steele, Geo. H. Dunning, J. C. Fugh, J. H. Kane, J. T. Bishop, C. Reibsame, J. W. Routh, E. F. Sibley, J. N. Coltrin, Joseph Prior and A. Toland, does, by the authority in him vested, empower and constitute them as charter members of an Encampment of the Grand Army of the Republic, to be known as Post No. 1, of Decatur, District of Macon, Department of Illinois, and they are hereby constituted as said Post, and authorized to make by-laws for the government of said Post, and to do and perform all acts necessary to conduct and carry out the constitution in accordance with the Constitution of the Grand Army of the Republic.

"Done at Springfield, Ill., this sixth day of April, 1866, in the presence of B. F. Stephenson, Commanding Department; Robert M. Woods, Adjutant-General."

The original record book, now in possession of Dunham Post No. 141, at Decatur, Ill., has the following notes under the record of Post No. 1:

"Sent Constitution by mail, May 14. Sent Charter by mail, May 16.

"April 18, Post No. 2, Springfield, Gen. T. S. Mathew, commanding.

"April 13, Dist. of Will, Capt. A. McIntosh, Com.

"April 23, Post No. 3, Morris, Col. H. M. Day, Com.

"April 23, Post No. 4, Ottawa and District of La Salle, Col. J. S. Lathrop, Com.

"April 24, Post No. 5, Freeport and District of Stephenson, Gen. B. Dornblaser, Com.

"April 21, Post No. 6, Bunker Hill, Capt. W. O. Jenks, Com.

"April 28, Post No. 7, Hillsboro, Maj. W. Armstrong, Com.

"April 18, Post No. 8, Carlinville, Col. Thos. Phillips, Com.

"April 18, Dist. of McCoupin, Gen. John I. Rinaker, Com."

On May 1, 1866, General Orders, No. 2, was issued as follows:

"General Orders, No. 2.  
"Headquarters Department of Illinois, Grand Army of the Republic, Springfield, Ill., May 1, 1866.

"I. For the purpose of the further organization of this Army the following officers will be appointed under Section 9 of Article 3 of the Constitution, and their names reported to these Headquarters, viz:

"Assistant Post Commander, Post Surgeon, Post Chaplain, Officer of the Day, Officer of the Guard.

"II. The duties of Assistant Post Commander are those of a Vice-President.

"III. It will be the duty of the Post Surgeon to examine and report on all cases presented for charity and assistance from the Post.

"IV. The Post Chaplain will be present at all assemblies of the command and officiate in the proper duties of his office.

"By order of B. F. Stephenson, Commanding Department.  
"Official: Robert M. Woods, Adjutant-General."

The Constitution above referred to was written by Adj. Gen. Woods. It was short and brief, but contained the plan of organization, providing for pre-encampment, to be known as Posts, County organizations to be known as Districts, and the National organization to be known as the Grand Army of the Republic. It provided for a Council of Administration, dues and revenue, and reports from Posts, Districts and Departments.

It was so short that it was not possible to print it in full. It was, however, the first step toward the organization of the Grand Army of the Republic.

It was so short that Dr. Stephenson was quite dissatisfied with it. Col. Snyder informed me that the Doctor thought it ought to be as voluminous as the Constitution of the United States. Dr. Stephenson sent it to Decatur for revision, but Capt. Kanan, Commander of Post No. 1, informed me that the Decatur Committee made no changes in the Constitution, though they shortened the Ritual. This Constitution was the one under which we worked from April 1 to May 1, 1866.

I had the Constitution and By-Laws printed, early in May, by Capt. George K. Webber, and began the distribution of these to the various Posts May 16, 1866.

The Rituals were printed at Decatur, under supervision of Lieut. John S. Phelps, A. D. C., and were finished the first week in June.

During the month of May we chartered eight Posts and eight Districts in Illinois. Col. Webber, A. D. C., made three trips to organize Posts and Districts, the first from April 6 to April 25, to Chicago, Joliet, Morris, Ottawa, La Salle and Freeport; the second from May 15 to June 1, to Quincy, Macomb, Kankakee, Middleport, Champaign, Danville, Charleston, Paris, Centralia, Salem, Carbondale and Cairo; the third, from June 1 to June 15, to Quincy, Macomb, Galesburg, Monmouth, Peoria, Leavenworth and Hennepin.

Lieut. John S. Phelps, A. D. C., made several trips, establishing Posts at Bunker Hill, April 21; at Hillsboro, April 28; at Carlinville, April 8; at Pana, May 7; at Shelbyville, May 3; at Litchfield, April 24; at Jerseyville, May 26. Gen. Lippincott established Post No. 13 at Alton, May 14.

July 12, 1866, Delegates from 60 Posts and Districts, members of the Grand Army of the Republic, and honorably discharged soldiers and sailors of this State, assembled in mass convention at Springfield, and, having taken the obligation, made a formal organization of the Department of Illinois, electing Gen. John M. Palmer Department Commander.

The Department of Illinois being now duly organized, let us turn our attention to efforts to organize the Grand Army of the Republic in other States.

In Ohio.

In May, 1866, Commander-in-Chief Stephenson dispatched Adj. Gen. Woods to neighboring States to organize Departments. I went to Columbus, Ohio, to organize the Department of Ohio. Gen. Benj. F. Potts, by appointment Provisional Commander of the Department, and issued the following order:

"Special Order, No. 5.  
"Headquarters Department of Illinois, Grand Army of the Republic, Springfield, Ill., May 4, 1866.

"Brevet Maj.-Gen. B. F. Potts is hereby authorized to organize and establish the Department of Ohio, in accordance with the Constitution of the Grand Army of the Republic in the State of Ohio. The Districts and Posts so organized shall make all returns and reports direct to the Department of Ohio, until the Department of Ohio is organized and transferred to it by order from these Headquarters.

"By order of B. F. Stephenson, Commanding Department.  
"Robert M. Woods, Adjutant-General."

Gen. Potts mustered in Post No. 1 at Carrollton, his residence, and pushed the organization vigorously in Ohio.

In Wisconsin.

May 28, 1866, I went to Madison, Wis. I got together in the State House, Gen. Lucius Fairchild, Governor, Gen. Russ, Gen. James K. Proudfit, Gen. Ed. Salomon, Geo. F. Rowell and others, and gave them the obligation of the Grand Army of the Republic in the State of Wisconsin. Gen. J. K. Proudfit, Provisional Commander, and issued the following:

"Special Order, No. 12.  
"Headquarters Department of Illinois, Grand Army of the Republic, Springfield, Ill., May 28, 1866.

"Geo. F. Rowell is hereby authorized to organize Districts and Posts of the Grand Army of the Republic in the State of Wisconsin.

"The Districts and Posts thus organized will make all reports and returns provided for by the Constitution to these Headquarters until otherwise ordered.

"Mr. Rowell will report the names of officers and charter members and they are hereby constituted as said Post, and authorized to make by-laws for the government of said Post, and to do and perform all acts necessary to conduct and carry out the constitution in accordance with the Constitution of the Grand Army of the Republic.

"Done at Springfield, Ill., this sixth day of April, 1866, in the presence of B. F. Stephenson, Commanding Department; Robert M. Woods, Adjutant-General."

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"Headquarters Department of Illinois, Grand Army of the Republic, Springfield, Ill., May 1, 1866.

"I. For the purpose of the further organization of this Army the following officers will be appointed under Section 9 of Article 3 of the Constitution, and their names reported to these Headquarters, viz:

"Assistant Post Commander, Post Surgeon, Post Chaplain, Officer of the Day, Officer of the Guard.

"II. The duties of Assistant Post Commander are those of a Vice-President.

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all returns, and report to these Headquarters until otherwise ordered.

"Gen. Gresham will report the names of officers and charter members of Districts and Posts established by him to these Headquarters, and will issue to them a certificate of organization, which will be forwarded by them with their application for a charter.

"By order of B. F. Stephenson, Commanding Department.  
"Robert Mann Woods, Adjutant-General."

This was accompanied by a full letter of instructions and a batch of Constitutions and Rituals. Gen. Gresham wrote that he could not find time to organize, and suggested the substitution of Col. A. J. Hawke in his place, which was done.

Col. Hawke organized some Posts, but failed to make any reports. But I find he was present at the first Encampment of the Department of Indiana, Nov. 21, 1866, and was elected Quartermaster-General of the Department, and was appointed Inspector-General, and carried that strong position by assault. I inclose reports of my subordinate commanders.

"Col. O. H. La Grange, who commanded the brigade, in his report, dated Macon, Ga., May 4, 1865, says: 'On the morning of April 12 the brigade entered Montgomery, the 4th Ky. having taken the fort at daylight, and passing through the city the 7th Ky. Cav. encountered 700 of the enemy under Gen. Buford and drove them eight miles, capturing three stands of colors and 40 prisoners. On the 16th the remainder of the brigade arrived in front of Fort Tyler. The 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 7th Ky. advanced and dismounted.'

"The Department of Indiana, organizing so late, had printed a good supply of all the printed matter, and had it on hand. It was printed at Indianapolis, Ind., by the Department of Indiana, and was forwarded to the Department of Indiana, Nov. 20, 1866.

The Whole Claim of Indiana.

In this fact lies the whole claim of Indiana. They did furnish the other States, and all comers with printed matter, and carried that strong position by assault. I inclose reports of my subordinate commanders.

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"The ditch being found impassable, bridges were prepared and sharpshooters posted, and when the charge was made the 7th Ky. Cav. rushed forward and entered the fort. Two U. S. flags (regimental colors) captured by the enemy (Tyler's Brigade, C. S. A.) near Enoch Creek, Ga., were recaptured by the 7th Ky. Cav. at Fort Tyler, Ga., April 16, 1865.

"Signed, O. H. La Grange, Colonel Commanding, Second Brigade, First Division."

"The part I quote from Col. La Grange's report can be found on pages 428, 429 and 430.

"Col. Lamson, 1st Ind. (Capt. Billingsley's regiment), in his report, on page 432, says:

"At 2 o'clock on the morning of the 16th the best mounted men of the regiment, in company with the 2d Ind., marched for West Point. The regiment charged into town under fire of the enemy's guns, securing the turnpike and railroad bridges, and then the post after a short, sharp contest surrendered to the remainder of the brigade."

"This report of Col. Lamson was written a few days after the fight. Had he in that short time forgot the gallant charge of the mule squadron and the special detail made to Capt. Billingsley's command, and did not honor him enough to report it?

"Now, let us see what the commander of my regiment says in denial of that positive assertion of Capt. B., made in his report to the press that 'my regiment was not at the capture of Fort Tyler.'

"To be brief, our first Colonel, John K. Feulner, was wounded at Franklin, Tenn., and died afterwards of that wound. Our Lieutenant-Colonel, W. W. Bradley, was wounded just four days before the fight at Fort Tyler, so Maj. A. S. Bloom, in command of the regiment. His report was made at Macon, Ga., May 2, 1865. I quote in part from the record (page 435) to show that he was in the fight and did not forget it in that little gun play. He says: 'On arriving in one mile of West Point I was ordered to prepare to fight on foot. I dismounted and formed the regiment, and then was instructed to place the enemy on the right (that placed our regiment between the 4th Ind. and the fort). When we got within 100 yards of the fort I ordered the men to commence firing. Immediately afterwards I placed sharpshooters near the fort, which had a telling effect, completely silencing a large piece of artillery on the right of the fort. After a fight raging furiously for over two hours I was directed to charge the fort. I ordered the men to prepare themselves with boards to cross the ditch. This being done and everything ready, the brigade bugle sounded the charge, which was promptly repeated by my bugles. My men obeyed the command nobly, crossed the deep ditch under the fort on boards, climbed the parapet and went over into the fort, capturing two stands of colors, which had been previously captured by the enemy, and assisted in capturing its garrison. (Signed) A. S. Bloom, Major, Commanding 7th Ky. Cav., Second Brigade, First Cavalry Division."

"Now, can my good friend and comrade, Capt. Billingsley, say that my regiment, the 7th Ky. Cav., was not at the capture of Fort Tyler?"

"Comrade Blehm, of my regiment, made the claim that he 'sounded the last bugle charge of the war,' and you have said most positively in two letters 'that neither he nor his regiment were there.'

"I saw the remainder of this fight from a house-top where a detachment of the 7th Ky. Cav. was stationed. This being done and everything ready, the brigade bugle sounded the charge, which was promptly repeated by my bugles. My men obeyed the command nobly, crossed the deep ditch under the fort on boards, climbed the parapet and went over into the fort, capturing two stands of colors, which had been previously captured by the enemy, and assisted in capturing its garrison. (Signed) A. S. Bloom, Major, Commanding 7th Ky. Cav., Second Brigade, First Cavalry Division."

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